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Unit 18 Boys and Literacy Teaching units.

Before our Very Eyes: *Intersecting images of gender, race and culture in pop media*

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Rationale

This unit is designed around the concept of visual literacy, which we see as just one of many kinds of literacies. Visual literacy is accessible to all young people, since it is so much a part of popular culture. It is a type of literacy which can both include and transcend racial, cultural **and** gender barriers. The language of pop music and TV is accessible to any young person who can listen to a radio or watch TV. Young people already have a vocabulary for reading and interpreting **pop** culture, however, this is often done from an uncritical position. In developing this unit we hope to engage the students in activities and processes which promote and foster more critically literate ways of reading popular culture texts. The construction of gender and race in popular culture, such as advertisements, film and video clips, often relies on portrayals of femininities, masculinities and race in very limited ways. These often stereotypical images promote subject 'positioning' underpinned by hegemonic relationships of power. This becomes problematic when non-resistant readings are taken up by viewers. The purpose of this unit is not only to deconstruct the subjectivities offered in the mass media (in order to empower reading positions) but to reconstruct gender and race **in** positive and different ways from the mainstream (to empower writing positions). **As** well as empowering reading and writing, this unit attempts to redress the gender imbalance in much of school-based literacies.

There is ample evidence to suggest **that** boys do not do as well as girls in subject English across Australia (Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities **1993**; Martino, **1994**; O'Doherty, S, **1994**; Alloway and Gilbert, 1995; Martino, 1995; Teese, R., Davies, M., Charlton, M. and Polesel, J., **1995**). Many of the activities in English classrooms demand exploration of the self in the form of personal expression, narrative genres, and/or literary criticism which does not conform to the ways in which boys socially construct themselves in terms of identity and power. What is powerful in the English classroom is not always conducive to a powerful masculine identity. This is not to encourage a backlash against the hard-won right of young girls to succeed in literacy, but to create and validate types of literacies to which both girls and boys have equal access and from which they derive equal pleasure. Visual texts are engaged in **and** enjoyed by boys more often than other types of texts. Since girls **also** enjoy these texts, mutual enjoyment, lively dialogue and interactive discourse can result in a classroom which engages all students in personally significant literacies.

Context

This unit is designed for a Year 10 class of mixed race and gender in **a** metropolitan school. The city is working class and has a large industrial and service base. The schools in the district service a wide cross section of students. The city has a large army population, a university, and various other services. It has a 10 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, as well as representation from various other cultural communities, such as Greek, Italian, Chinese, Lebanese, Thai, Filipino, **and** Nicaraguan as well as Anglo-Australians. Therefore at any school, there is likely to be a mixed student population. Townsville, like many regional communities, is isolated geographically, therefore its population does not have access to many non-mainstream popular culture events (films, concerts, etc.), except for SBS TV, which many young people seem to avoid. These students are fed on an almost ubiquitous diet of mainstream mass media images and messages. Whilst we recognise that not all readers of these texts read them uncritically, they do represent a narrow range of discourses and subject positions. These mass media texts also present a set of discourses, which most students, regardless of gender or race can read with interest and enjoyment. Widening the range of possible readings of the images presented through TV video clips, film and printed text advertisements, is seen therefore as a priority.

Activities and assessment

A linear overview of the genres and text types covered in the unit

This unit could last for 10 weeks or a full term. The entire unit need not be undertaken, segments can be used independently and texts may vary according to availability and preference of the students and/or teachers. We have taught the unit in one form or another and find that it engages both girls and boys as well as students from varying racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The unit can also be used across a range of age groups; for example we have used the magazine ad with Year 9 students. We have used the video clip and reviews with

Year 10. The review has also been used with Year 11 students. With **a** little modification **and** imagination, the unit can be rewritten and adapted for a wide range of contexts. In the unit there are three assessable items. All activities are linked by student journal work (not assessed) which assists reflection and continuity for both teachers and learners. In this journal the students record ideas, questions, discussion points and responses to worksheets and other classroom discourse. The tasks need not be used in the order presented.

Assessment 1

Two reviews (a) one promotional and (b) one critical

Audience: teens / adults

Purpose: (a) To promote the film **using** persuasive language.

(b) To persuade and inform; to critique and deconstruct the film as text

Form: One promotional review **and** one critical review

Context: (a) Cinema flyer or video promotional magazines

(b) Cinema review magazine

Non-assessed journal work

Worksheet 1 Film Analysis for a Promotional Film analysis: masculinity reconstructed - *The Fan*

Worksheet 2 Definitions

Worksheet **3** Guide to critical reading of film - *Batman Forever*

Assessment 2

Storyboard for a current video clip for a ballad, rap or lyric which resists or counteracts current pop culture discourses, including stereotypes of race, gender and contexts - approx 15-20 frames of storyboard.

Audience Video production team

Purpose: To entertain and provide graphical/ cinematographical images for a musical text

Form: Storyboard

Context: *Rage* , *Recovery* or *Video Hits*

Non-assessed journal work

Worksheet 4: Analysis of power relationships and images in video clips

If the teacher does not have a solid grounding in critical literacy and/or has not worked through the professional development units in Alloway *et al.* (1996), it is highly recommended that this be undertaken: of particular importance are Chapters **2**, **3** and **5** in Alloway *et al.* Also see Moon (1992) for accessible theoretical background. It is particularly important that teachers understand the language of poststructuralism/ postmodernism to assist students *to* come to terms with the language of deconstructive critique. We cursorily introduce some important concepts in Worksheet 2.

Assessment 3

To create a printed text advertisement with graphics which construct men and boys, and women and girls in a range of situations in which atypical power relationships are demonstrated. The product or concept is free choice. The length of the final product will be no longer than a double A4 page.

Audience Teens/adults

Purpose: To persuade and to sell an idea or product

Form: Printed text ad

Context: Magazine

Non-assessed journal work

Worksheet 5

Analysis of printed text advertisements

Unit Scope and sequence- brief guide to the learning tasks

Task 1	Activity: Reviews	Links	Resources
<p>Orientating Phase</p> <p>Reading and writing reviews</p>	<p>Determine students' prior knowledge by discussion, questions, journal work. Begin initial group discussion of ideas, images and clips using various films which construct masculinity / femininity / ethnicity in stereotypical ways e.g.: <i>Indiana Jones, Batman</i>, etc. View <i>The Fan</i> or another film that reconstructs masculinity in atypical ways.</p>	<p>This gives students a vocabulary to talk about films, video clips, cartoons, ads, etc.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Films in DVD form</p>
<p>Enhancing phase</p> <p>Promotional Review</p>	<p>Group and class discussion about specific scenes from <i>The Fan</i>. Introduce the genre of the film promo and film review.</p> <p>Ensure each student has a copy of a promo magazine and model of promotional review.</p> <p>Processing through pair, small group and whole Class discussion about the layout and montage of the magazine: e.g. use of colour, way that 'reviews' are positioned on the page, the photographs that are used to promote the films. Also discuss the way that men and women are portrayed in the photographs, why this is so, and what it says about the way gender, sex, race, ethnicity are represented in the texts and in film texts.</p>	<p>Language Links</p> <p>This gives students a vocabulary to talk about films, video clips, cartoons, ads, etc.</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Comics, clips, video and promotional magazines (e.g. free <i>Civic Video Previews</i> and <i>Video Ezy Magazine</i>)</p> <p>Worksheet</p>
<p>Promotional review</p> <p>(continued)</p>	<p>In groups analyse the generic features of the video promo. Students should discover that they are short, easy to read, give information about the actors, theme and plot, and that most are accompanied by a photo of the starring actor(s). They should also see that there is not too much critical analysis of the films. The main idea is to promote it by highlighting or sensationalising certain textual features.</p>	<p>Textual features, codes and conventions of a promotional review</p> <p>Discuss the notion of the reader or constructed reading/ viewing positions.</p>	<p>Groups list these and record them on an OHT or black or white board.</p>
<p>Orientating Phase</p> <p>Critical Review</p>	<p>Introduce the genre of the film critique in the form of a review. Ensure each student has a copy of a model of a critical review.</p> <p>Class discussion about the layout and montage of the magazine: e.g. use of colour, way 'reviews' are positioned on the page, the flyer photographs that are used to support the films. Also discuss the way men and women are portrayed in the photographs, why this is SO, and what it says about the way gender, sex, race, ethnicity are represented in the texts and in film texts.</p>		<p>Worksheets 2 and 3:</p> <p>Definitions and Guide to critical analysis of film examples of critical reviews.</p> <p>Suggested texts:</p> <p>Any examples of critical reviews: eg: <i>Cinema Papers</i> or <i>Preview</i>, <i>The Bulletin</i> or <i>Weekend Australian</i></p>

Task 1	Activity: Reviews	Links	Resources
	A full viewing of <i>Batman Forever</i> . Like most cartoon based films, it presents masculinity, femininity, race, etc., in very limited, almost parodic ways. Masculinity is presented conventionally, in 2D, as powerful, silent, active, mostly emotionless, mythical, etc., and the victim/female is presented as his love interest/human flaw.	Students make links to Journal Worksheet 2 with the film.	See Moon (1992) Alloway <i>et al.</i> (1996). <i>Forever</i> (or other superhero), Eco (1979). The concepts of pastiche, nostalgia, etc. See Worksheet 2. See Henry (1996) and Rowntree, (1995) for other ideas on cartoons and superheroes.
Enhancing phase Critical review	In groups analyse generic features of the critical review. Students should discover that they are short, easy to read, give information about the actors and characters, themes, narrative devices and plot and that most are accompanied by a photo of the starring actor(s). They should also see that film reviews can be <i>critical</i> . The following elements must be considered and included: 1. Content: ideas about deconstruction of gender and racial stereotypes from the journal work 2. Purpose: to persuade the viewer and reader whether or not to see the film.	Students make written and/or verbal links by comparing and contrasting the various types of reviews, i.e. promotional and critical. Links may be made between the two films and the respective worksheets and the deconstruction of both in the students' journals.	Teachers provide appropriate models of critical review. Worksheets 2 and 3 as well as notes in student journals.
Synthesising phase Promotional and critical review writing	Students discuss in groups the masculine/feminine constructions of the films. They may also discuss the meanings and generic features of the films according to the models provided and draft their reviews. Final drafting of reviews with consultation provide basis for assessment in the area of functional writing, or reaction to literature and the media.		Models, student journals, class notes. * Students can do this as an exam, but it can also be written as a take home assessment or a piece that has been processed and drafted with the teacher.
Task 2	Activity: Video clip	Language Links	Resources
Orientating phase Video clip Storyboard	Using ideas from the links, the students can discuss the difference between masculine and feminine constructions in video clips. * Journal work – Positioning of males/females in rock/pop video clips - power relationships. Break down filmed sequences for storyboard. Final storyboard can seriously represent gender constructions and power relationships and/or construct a parody, which switches gender roles and relationships, e.g. Wannabe. 'If you wanna be my lover', 'Macarena', or New Edition's, 'Hit me off' - a parody of James Bond images in song. These will date so, use latest examples.*	Links to music video clips through pop icons, sports idols. Shaquille, O'Neal, Mal Meninga, Cathy Freeman, Nova Peris and Baden Choppy (<i>These will date, so use current examples</i>)* Connect the status of sports stars with that of rock stars and movie stars such as Eddy Murphy, Jacky Chan, Demi Moore.	Posters and/or news articles or news footage of these stars might help as stimulus material. Worksheet 4, Analysis of power relationships and images in video clips Video tape a recent version of <i>Rage</i> (ABC) or <i>Video Hits</i> (Channel 10) from TV, or MTV footage. *The more current this is the better, unless you want to do a historical comparison.

Task 2	Activity: Reviews	Links	Resources
Enhancing Phase Videoclip storyboard	<p>Models of parodies of Top 40 from <i>Full Frontal</i> (or other parodic sketch show) could be shown and storyboarded as examples of the final product. Examine the various relationships in the narratives of the videos.</p> <p>1 Woman/man e.g. lovers, girlfriend/ friends, boyfriend, sex object/ voyeur, mother/son, daughter/father, member of musical group, etc.</p> <p>2 Woman/woman, friends, lovers, mother/ daughter, member of musical group. What do women do in the clip? How are they positioned?</p> <p>3 Man/man, e.g., mates/friends, father /son, lovers, member of musical group, other. List any examples of gender relationships that challenge the norm.</p> <p>Discuss and list any examples of contrasting styles/songs/ images you see in the line-up of the top 50, e.g. 'bad boy' black rappers; followed by good girls in white singing romantic love songs.</p>	<p>This could be used for discussing 'otherness'</p> <p>Links can be made between this work and the work for the film deconstruction of <i>Batman</i> where Kidman was positioned as 'woman in White', villains (and male superhero) in black and other stereotypical characterisations.</p>	<p>Journal,</p> <p>Worksheet 4 Analysis of power relationships and images in video clips</p> <p>Videos of <i>Rage</i>, etc., and <i>Full Frontal</i> (or similar show) parodies.</p> <p>For definition of 'otherness', see Worksheet 4</p>
Synthesising phase Video clip storyboards	<p>Following the critical journal work, students should have an idea of reading resistantly.</p> <p>Students then write a paragraph explaining the storyline of the clip, followed by a paragraph explaining the images they might resist.</p> <p>Model scene breakdown and generic features of storyboard. Students then write a paragraph that presents the 'scene breakdown'.</p> <p>Draft storyboard ideas: these includes frames (model these), camera angles, any dialogue or words of song, and/or notes on images.</p>	<p>Links to Worksheet 2: Definitions.</p>	<p>For a detailed guide of how to construct a storyboard see Jennings (1990) <i>Round the Twist</i> and Katz, (1993), <i>Film Direction Shot by Shot Or</i> Stewart and Kowaltske (1997) <i>Media New Ways and Meanings</i></p>
Task 3	Activity: Reviews	Links	Resources
Orientating phase Visual text advertisement	<p>Students look at ads in magazines and how they work according to: images, colours, layout, relationship between language and visual text. Each brings in their own magazine, not necessarily one that they read regularly; it is sometimes easier to resist ads in magazines aimed at a different target</p>	<p>Links can be made between the construction of masculinity and femininity in the ads from gendered and non-gendered magazines</p>	<p><i>Cleo</i>, <i>Dolly</i>, <i>The Bulletin</i>, <i>Sports Illustrated</i> can be brought in and chosen by the students.</p> <p>Teacher's resource: Eco (1979) for discussion</p>

	<p>audience from their own age/gender groups.</p> <p>To contextualise the ad, students need to discuss the <i>model reader</i> of the text in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic position, ethnicity etc.</p> <p>These notes can be kept in a journal or discussed at the teacher's discretion.</p> <p>Model the textual analysis of an advertisement for the students in a blatantly sexist ad and talk about context, market audience, images and language, etc.</p>	<p>construction of 2D characters in the promotional film review and the traditional narrative constructions and 2 D characters in the video clips.</p> <p>Journal work.</p>	<p>of model, negotiated and resistant readings.</p>
Task 3	Activity: Reviews	Links	Resources
Enhancing phase Visual text advertisement	<p>Using a series of questions, students choose and respond in journal form to one particular ad. The analysis should focus on particular gender stereotyping and the ways images, layout and written text construct a particular reading.</p> <p>Using the theory of Gen X, ads which appeal to those who have been raised on a diet of advertisements and have become resistant to them can be the basis for discussing ads which do not appeal to conventional market forces, and which are in fact anti-ads (e.g. Sprite - Image is nothing). These may be used as models for the sorts of ads which the students recreate.</p>	<p>Links can be made between the atypical film in which gender stereo types are challenged and the 'types' of people who can be represented in the Gen X ad.</p>	<p>Worksheet 5 Analysis of printed text advertisements.</p> <p>Article 'Gen X', <i>Metro</i>, (Hicks, 1996) may be a useful teacher resource here.</p>
Synthesising phase Visual text advertisement	<p>Students create or recreate an ad (or redraft an existing ad) for assessment purposes, which challenges the existing power relations between men and women, mother and son, father and daughter, girls and boys etc. This should be suitable for inclusion in a magazine of the type that the students first studied in the journal analysis of the printed text ads.</p>		<p>Paper, collage from existing ads and photographic images, light box if one is available.</p> <p>Computers and visual editing software, if available</p>

Conclusion

Perhaps at the end of this unit the students might also write up in their journals how they have felt about how it helped them to synthesise the ideas about gendered, cultural and racial power relationships in the media. They might also then translate and transfer these ideas into the relationships explored in more open texts or 'literary texts'. The novels and plays that they might read for English, for example, can then similarly be critiqued. In this way students develop intertextual **links** beyond those of the mass media. The idea is to encourage resistant readings of all texts and to carry new ideas about gender, racial, and cultural constructions beyond the classroom and into the cinemas and their lounge rooms at home.

Worksheet 1

Film analysis for a promotional review

Masculinity reconstructed

As you view the film *The Fan*, make notes in a two column format on the role of women and the role of men and the relationships between them in the scenes of the film. Your notes might consider the following points and questions:

1. Characterisation

Are the women and the men active or passive? How are they constructed? Are these constructions stereotypical? Have the filmmakers made any attempt to reflect the roles of modern women and men in society or are they two dimensional (i.e. they don't develop in the course of the film)?

- How is the villain depicted in this film? Is the characterisation one or two dimensional?
- Consider the role of the hero or the central character. Look back at your journal notes in columns which describe the ways that men and women are constructed in this film. What can you say about the construction of the baseball player? In how many different ways is he positioned (e.g. as father, son, player, victim, etc.)? Is he a rounded or developed character or is he two-dimensional?
- What can you say about the construction of the character played by Robert de Niro in *The Fan* (obsessed villain, macho man).

2. Plot

- Before the viewing is finished can the ending be predicted?
- After viewing the film make a plot outline.
- Consider the ending of the film. Is the text left open or is it closed? Refer particularly to character constructions here.

3. Reading position

- Would you say that the model reader for *The Fan* is male or female? List your reasons why. How do you as a girl or a boy respond to this kind of construction of men and women in the film?
- As a writer/viewer in what ways can you sensationalise this film i.e.: what aspects of it can you promote for the reading/viewing public? What aspects of the film appeal to you, that you could pass on to others to interest them in viewing the film?
- Your promotional review should reflect some of the ideas from your journal and discussion work based on this worksheet. Remember the idea is to *sell* or promote this film, so your language register should reflect this purpose.

Worksheet 2

Definitions

Firstly there are some terms which will be useful to define before attempting to work on the critique of *Batman Forever* or any blockbuster film.

Construction This is the idea that people are *socially constructed* and *positioned* by those around them and their environment: e.g., I may be constructed as a teacher, but outside the classroom a mother or father, at a sporting club as a cricket coach, as a musician when I play in the band etc. Each time I am positioned I am reconstructed according to the context in which I am operating and this changes all the time.

We are going to look at how some of the characters in *Batman* are constructed by what they do and say and how others interact with them. So *construction* is *essentially* about how *people are positioned*.

Deconstruction All texts are products of a culture. This means that texts (in the broadest sense of the word) contain a lot of different ways of seeing and speaking about the world (discourses). Texts are like a stained glass window; each little piece goes to make up the entire text. When we read or watch a text, we usually see the bigger picture rather than the pieces that make it up.

*To deconstruct the text is to look for the smaller pieces and see what patterns they form; to see what the dominant attitudes about men or women are; for example or Black or Asian people; how the text can silence certain groups and give voice to others. Deconstruction is a way of reading that allows us to see the cultural and discursive patterns in a text that might otherwise remain invisible or hidden in the patterns of the 'big picture' (e.g. racism, sexism, liberalism or postmodernism for that matter). It is not aimed at destroying the text, but at seeing through it. We can 'enjoy' a film like *Bad Boys*, but we can also see how it constructs men, women, African-Americans, good versus evil, etc., and thereby see what it is 'saying' and what it 'tells' us about the world we live in.*

Postmodernism The theory of postmodernism reflects the idea that there is nothing new or original to be created, that works of art, like films, printed texts and so on are imitations of those created previously. Films such as *The Terminator*, *The Mask* and *Batman* can sometimes be read as postmodern cultural products because they 'turn in on themselves' - or are *reflexive*. There is the sense for the reader that they are able to stand outside the text and accept or reject the story, the characters, the ideas or themes which underpin the text. If you accept

the story at face value you are a *model reader* **and** if you resist the story you are a resistant *reader*. This resistance may derive from gender, e.g. a female is less likely to be a model reader of a macho-action movie, and a male reader may be more able to resist a romantic text, since this is probably constructed for a female reader/viewer.

Pastiche This is the putting together of events, actions, ideas and objects from different times that are often incompatible, anachronistic or which sometimes seem 'out of place'. In **film**, other films are echoed and various genres are intermixed, e.g. romance, action, martial arts, the western showdown in *Batman*.

Nostalgia This involves a harking back to the past. In terms of text it often entails remakes of old films (*The Addams Family* or *Cape Fear*) or songs (e.g. the remake of Tina Turner's song, 'What's love got to do with it?').

Worksheet 3

Critical film analysis

Deconstruction of *Batman Forever*: starring Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Nicole Kidman, Chris O'Donnell and Jim Carrey

Director: Joel Schumaker

Producer: Tim Burton

Distributor: Warner Bros

As you view the film make notes on the role of women and the role of men and the relationships between them in the scenes of the film? Your notes might consider the following points and questions:

- 1 Are the women and men active or passive? How are they constructed? Are these constructions stereotypical? Have they made any attempt to reflect the roles of modern women or men in society or are they two-dimensional (ie: they don't develop in the course of the film)?
 - 2 a before the viewing is finished can you predict the ending?
b After viewing the film make a detailed plot outline.
 3. Can you take the plot of the film seriously? *Batman* on TV was originally designed as a parody film for adults and then became a cult show for kids. The series of Batman films reflect the postmodern tendency towards pastiche and nostalgia and there are many examples of this in the film. List some of them.
 - 4 Consider the ending of the film. Are there any indications that there will be another *Batman* story in the series? Is the text left open or is it closed? Refer particularly to the way characters are constructed here.
 - 5 Would you say that the model reader for *Batman Former* is male or female? List your reasons. How do you as a girl or boy respond to this **kind** of construction of men and women in the film?
 - 6 In what ways can you resist this film i.e.: what aspects of it do you find it hard to believe?
 - 7 How are different races represented in the film? For example, how are black men =and women positioned and constructed in the text? (What do they do? How do they behave? etc.) How are Asian men or women positioned in &e film? How are Anglo-European men and women positioned in the film?
- Your critical review should reflect some of the ideas from your journal and As you view the film **make** notes in a two column format on the role of women discussion work based on this worksheet.

Worksheet 4

Analysis of power relationships and images in video clips

Definition of *otheredness*

'Otheredness' refers to the cultural power relationships and positioning of a group of people or an individual as an outsider or 'other' to a 'norm' of a particular situation or context e.g. black is other to white in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon society, female is other to male in a Rugby League club. An example of otheredness can be seen in a 1996 video clip entitled 'Enigma'. This is an instrumental sound track, in which a scantily clad young Asian woman is positioned as foreigner or outsider by walking silently, detached and enigmatically through a Western cityscape. The result of othering is usually discrimination and marginalisation (i.e. pushing the 'othered' to the outside).

One of the ways of identifying otheredness in text is by non-representation of marginalised groups or individuals, i.e. absence or *gaps* or *silences*; gaps get filled in by our 'common sense' assumptions and silences deny voice to marginalised people, (characters in text), which affects their potential power in situations.

Students may wish to discuss the video clip 'Enigma' by BBE featuring the Asian woman mentioned above.

How does her silence position and construct her within the text, and outside of the text, as a visual 'object'?

1 Where is the clip set? There may be more than one setting used, e.g. studio, outdoors, beach shots, alleyway, driving in a car.

2 What do the women say?

3 What are they wearing?

4 Are the women white, black or Asian? Is the representation of race important in how you read this narrative?

5 Are the men white, black or Asian? Is the way that people of different races are presented important in how you read this narrative?

6 What do women do in the clip or how are they positioned?

7 How do you feel about this representation of women?

8 What do men say in the clip?

9 What are the men wearing?

10 What do men do in the clip? How are they positioned? How do you feel about this representation of men?

11 List any stereotypical portrayals (e.g. macho man - 'the bad boy', or the 'ultra-feminine woman', the princess, or any others that you might observe).

12 What do the clips tell us about the 'ideal' way that people should act if they are black, Asian or white women, or black, Asian or white men?

13 List any examples of power relationships which challenge mainstream stereotypes?

14 List any examples of gender or race construction or representations which challenge conventional ways of seeing the world? (That is, those that go against the grain of mainstream social values and attitudes.)

Worksheet 5

Analysis of printed text advertisements

What is Gen X?

Hicks (1996) briefly defines the term 'Gen X' (Generation X) as:

a cohort of young adults, born roughly between the mid 60s and 70s, who have grown up deconstructing mass media texts and who are now themselves the unwilling target of marketing campaigns. The ways advertisers try to get onside with Generation X, a target market that declares 'I am not a target market' (Coupland, 1992), often involve postmodern techniques such as pastiche, irony, parody and reflexivity - ways of playing with the real - and such advertisements frequently make use of notions of the real, for example in slogans such as 'image is nothing' or 'it's got to be real'. (p. 71)

Other examples include a Pizza Hut TV spot, in which a customer asking for the \$6.95 special, when offered more information on it, says:

'I know, I saw it in the ad.'

'You can't have', says the employee, 'this is the ad.'

'I knew that,' says the customer. (p. 78)

The pizza ad cited above is a good example of reflexivity and parody at the same time. As a starting point for visual text ad analysis, students could discuss or list other ads they have seen which employ some of these devices. After choosing a specific ad, students could discuss and note the following questions:

1 In which magazine does this ad appear?

2 Describe the model reading audience for this ad.

3 Comment on any written text in the ad. What is the main message conveyed by the language?

In groups discuss and record your responses to the following:

4 Look carefully at the graphics - what is the first element in the picture to catch your eye?

5 What is the relationship between the text and the graphics? (Include reference to image, shape, colour, positioning, etc.)

6 How are girls and women represented in this ad?

7 How are boys and men represented in this ad?

8 Is there any particular representation of race?

9 Can you resist the message presented in this ad? Explain how you can resist it.

- 10 How might the ad change if the central model was Vietnamese, Chinese, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? Why might this be so?
- 11 How might the presence of only one cultural, ethnic or racial group in **an** ad silence or marginalise other members of the community?
- 12 What changes could be made to the ad which reconstruct less typical power relations (gender, race, culture, class)? You can change the language, images or both.
- 13 What** is the main message of the new **ad** after you have made the changes?

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